
STANDARDIZED EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
APPROVED COURSE OF INSTRUCTION
FIELD COURSE

PRINCIPLES AND
FEATURES OF ICS

MODULE 2
I-200

PARTICIPANT
REFERENCE
MANUAL
2003

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PARTICIPANT REFERENCE MANUAL

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This module briefly describes the principal features which constitute the Incident Command System. Collectively, these features identify the unique quality of the ICS as an incident or event management system.

Objectives:

Describe and explain the use of:

- Primary management functions
- Management by Objectives
- Unity and Chain of Command
- Establishment and transfer of command
- Organizational flexibility
- Unified Command
- Span of control
- Common terminology
- Personnel accountability
- Integrated communications
- Resources management
- The Incident Action Plan

I. The Features of ICS

The Incident Command System was developed by an inter-agency Task Force made up of local, state, and federal personnel directly involved in day-to-day incident management. Their design intent was to develop a system that could be used in a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional environment, and importantly, could also serve as the basic incident management system for all responses.

The design and configuration of ICS allows for and encourages the use of interagency; personnel, resources and coordination at all system levels.

There are a number of features associated with ICS that make it an effective management system. ICS has the organizational flexibility to be used for managing small and large incidents and events. On smaller incidents, not all of the features may be necessary or applied.

Twelve of the principal features of ICS are briefly described in this module. All of these will be covered in more detail in other modules.

II. Primary ICS Management Functions

- Command
- Operations
- Planning/Intelligence
- Logistics
- Finance/Administration

The individual designated as the Incident Commander (IC) has responsibility for all functions. That person may elect to perform all functions, or delegate authority to perform functions to other people in the organization. Delegation does not, however, relieve the Incident Commander from overall responsibility.

The principal ICS management functions are:

Command - The Incident Commander is responsible for all incident or event activity. Although other functions may be left unfilled, there will always be an Incident Commander.

Operations - The Operations Section is responsible for directing the tactical actions to meet incident objectives.

Planning/Intelligence - The Planning/Intelligence Section is responsible for the collection, evaluation, and display of incident information, maintaining status of resources, and preparing the Incident Action Plan and incident-related documentation.

Logistics - The Logistics Section is responsible for providing adequate services and support to meet all incident or event needs.

Finance/Administration - The Finance/Administration Section is responsible for keeping track of incident-related costs, personnel and equipment records, and administering procurement contracts associated with the incident or event.

Each of these functional areas can be expanded as needed into additional organizational units with further delegation of authority.

III. Management by Objectives

Management by Objectives covers four essential steps. These steps take place on every incident regardless of size or complexity.

1. Know agency policy and direction.
2. Establish Incident objectives.
3. Select appropriate strategy(ies) to accomplish objectives.
4. Perform tactical direction (applying tactics appropriate to the strategy, assigning the right resources, and monitoring performance).

A detailed discussion of these steps is included in Module 7.

IV. Unity and Chain of Command

In ICS, Unity of Command means that every individual has a designated supervisor.

Chain of Command means that there is an orderly line of authority within the ranks of the organization with lower levels subordinate to, and connected to, higher levels.

In the majority of incidents, the organizational structure for operations will consist of:

- Command
- Single Resources

However, as incidents expand the Chain of Command is established through an organizational structure which can consist of several levels.

- Command
- Sections
- Branches
- Divisions/Groups
- Units
- Resources

V. Establishment and Transfer of Command

Command at an incident is initially established by the highest ranking or senior authority at the scene that has jurisdiction for the incident.

Transfer of Command at an incident may take place for the following reasons:

1. A more qualified person assumes command.
2. The incident situation changes over time to where a jurisdictional or agency change in command is legally required, or it makes good management sense to make a transfer of command.
3. Normal turnover of personnel on long or extended incidents.

VI. Organizational Flexibility

The ICS organization adheres to a "form follows function" philosophy. In other words, the organization at any given time should reflect only what is required to meet planned tactical objectives.

The size of the current organization and the organization needed for the next operational period is determined through the incident action planning process.

A number of organizational elements may be activated in the various sections without activating sectional chiefs.

Each activated element must have a person in charge of it. In some cases a single supervisor may initially be in charge of more than one unit.

Elements which have been activated and are clearly no longer needed should be deactivated to decrease organizational size.

VII. Unified Command

Unified Command is an ICS management process that allows all agencies who have jurisdictional or functional responsibility for the incident to jointly develop a common set of incident objectives and strategies. This is accomplished without losing or giving up agency authority, responsibility, or accountability.

Unified Command is an important feature of ICS. It allows agencies having a legitimate responsibility at an incident to be part of the Incident Command function.

During Unified Command, the following applies:

- The incident will function under a single, coordinated Incident Action Plan.

- One Operations Section Chief will have responsibility for implementing the Incident Action Plan.
- One Incident Command Post will be established.

There are a number of other considerations involved in Unified Command, and these are covered in Module 13.

VIII. Span of Control

Span of control relates to the number of individuals one supervisor can effectively manage. Maintaining an effective span of control is particularly important to ensure safety and accountability have the highest priority.

In ICS, the span of control for any supervisor falls within a range of 3 to 7. If a supervisor has fewer than three people reporting, or more than seven, some adjustment to the organization should be considered.

The guidelines for span of control in ICS is one supervisor to five subordinates.

IX. Common Terminology

In the ICS, common terminology is applied to:

- Organizational elements
- Position titles
- Resources
- Facilities

Organizational Elements - There is a consistent pattern for designating each level of the organization (e.g., sections, branches, etc.).

Position Titles - Those charged with management or leadership responsibility in ICS are referred to by position title such as Liaison Officer, Operations Section Chief, Service Branch Director, Group Supervisor, etc. This is done to provide a way to place the most qualified personnel in organizational positions on multi-agency incidents without confusion caused by various multi-agency rank designations. It also provides a standardized method for ordering personnel to fill positions.

Resources - Common designations are assigned to various kinds of resources.

Many kinds of resources may also be classified by type, which will indicate their capabilities (e.g., types of helicopters, patrol units, engines, etc.).

For example, in ICS a vehicle that is used in fire suppression is called an engine. Recognizing that there is a variety of engines, a type classification is given based on tank capacity, pumping capability, staffing, and other factors.

Facilities - Several primary facilities have been designated and described for widespread use in the ICS. The facilities that are discussed in the Field Response level of instruction are:

- Incident Command Post (ICP) - Location where the primary command activities are conducted.
- Staging Area - Locations attached to the incident where resources may be temporarily located while awaiting assignments.
- Base - The location where primary logistics functions for an incident are coordinated and administered.
- Camp - A location within the general incident area which is equipped and staffed to provide sleeping, food, water and sanitary services to incident personnel.
- Helibase - The main location for parking, fueling, maintenance and loading of helicopters operating in support of an incident.
- Helispot - Any designated location at an incident where a helicopter can safely land and take off.

While these facilities will meet the requirements of most incidents, discipline specific applications may require the use of additional facility locations. For example, a temporary morgue facility may be set up for certain incidents.

X. Personnel Accountability

Several procedures within ICS ensure personnel accountability.

- Check-In - Mandatory for all personnel upon arrival at an incident.
- Unity of Command - Ensures everybody has only one supervisor.
- Resource Status Unit - Maintains status of all assigned resources.
- Division/Group Assignment Lists - Identifies resources with active assignments in the Operations Section.
- Unit Logs - A record of personnel assigned and major events in all ICS organizational elements.

XI. Integrated Communications

The ability to communicate within ICS is absolutely essential.

Communications can be looked at in at least three different ways.

1. The "hardware" systems that transfer information.
2. Planning for the use of all available communications frequencies and resources.
3. The procedures and processes for transferring information.

Just as every incident requires an Incident Action Plan, every incident also needs a Communications Plan. Like the Incident Action Plan, it can be very simple and stated orally, or it can be quite complex, and form a part of a written Incident Action Plan.

Several communication networks may be established depending upon the size and complexity of the incident. These may include:

- Command Net - Established to link supervisory personnel from Incident Commander down to and including division and group supervisors.
- Tactical Nets - Established in a variety of ways, e.g., by agency, department, geographical area, or function. Tactical nets may be established for each branch, or for divisions and groups, depending upon hardware and frequency availability, and specific incident needs.
- Support Nets - Established on larger incidents to handle logistics traffic and resource status changes.
- Ground-to-Air - Established to coordinate ground-to-air traffic.
- Air-to-Air - Assigned for coordination between aircraft assigned to an incident.

An awareness of available communications systems and frequencies, combined with an understanding of incident requirements, will enable the Communications Unit Leader to develop an effective Communications Plan for each operational period.

An essential part of an effective multi-agency incident management system is for all communications to be in clear text. That is, do not use radio codes.

XII. Resources Management

Resources assigned to an incident are managed in one of the following ways:

- Single Resources - Single Resources include both personnel and their required equipment.
- Task Forces - A Task Force is any combination of single resources within span of control guidelines. They are assembled for a particular tactical need, with common communications and a leader. Task Forces can be pre-determined or assembled at an incident from available single resources.

Task Forces are defined according to the operational need. For example, a task force used by a jurisdiction in an urban civil disorder might include:

One police patrol unit, three fire engines, and one basic life support unit.

Another example of a Task Force might be:

One bulldozer, and three dump trucks.

- Strike Teams, Squads, Mobile Field Forces - These resources are a combination of a designated number of the same kind and type of resources with common communications and a leader. The number of resources to be used will be based on what is needed to perform the function. Span of control guidelines should apply. These resources can be pre-determined or assembled at an incident from available single resources.

The use of Task Forces and other resources:

- Maximizes effective use of resources
- Reduces span of control
- Reduces communications traffic.

Tactical resources assigned to an incident will always be in one of three status conditions.

Assigned - Resources performing an active assignment

Available - Resources ready for deployment

Out of Service - Resources not assigned or not available.

XIII. The Incident Action Plan

Every incident needs an Incident Action Plan.

- The purpose of the plan is to provide all incident supervisory personnel with appropriate direction for future actions.
- The plan may be oral or written.

Written plans should be used when it is essential that all levels of a growing organization have a clear understanding of the tactical actions associated with the next operational period. It is important to use written incident action plans whenever:

- Two or more jurisdictions are involved
- The incident will overlap a new operational period

- Personnel changes (shift changes)
- There is a partial or full activation of the ICS organization.

In ICS, an Incident Briefing Form (ICS 201) is used on incidents to record initial actions and list assigned and available resources. As incidents grow in complexity and/or size ICS provides a format for a written incident action plan.